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FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

DUPPLICATES

(2)

United States Department of Agriculture Volume 2, Number 3
Summer 1985



FLYING HIGH WITH FALL FOODS
High-Tech Office Lunches
To Go
Packing Safe School
Lunches
Be-witching, Nutritious
Halloween Fare

Also Featuring:

*New Guidelines —
Coping with "Refrigerator"
Molds

FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

Summer 1985
Vol. 2, No. 3

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PERSPECTIVES



Dear Reader:

As summer fades into fall, our attention turns to traditional autumn events — the start of another school year, the beginning of football season and heartier cool-weather meals. This issue of "Food News For Consumers" is in tune with those changes.

Of course, safe food handling practices never go out of season,

and this issue is also full of food safety information. "Know Your Molds" covers how to cope with the dread "refrigerator" molds, and you may want to try your hand at this issue's insidious quiz "How Do You Score on Food Safety?"

On the party side, if you're interested in Halloween entertaining for youngsters or a "tailgate" supper for adults, you won't want to miss our suggestions for both those gatherings.

Microwave ovens in employee cafeterias are ideal for heating packed lunches, but proper storage temperatures — as cold as possible — between breakfast and lunch are essential to prevent food-borne illness. "A New Look in Hot Lunches from Home" explains how to move beyond soups and sandwiches to a greater variety of safe, hot, take-along lunches.

We are pleased to announce in this issue that the Meat and Poultry Hotline has a new toll-free number (800-535-4555), and that Hotline staffers are geared up now to handle the anticipated increase in calls.

Have a happy autumn and, as always, let us know if you have questions on meat and poultry. It's easier now than ever with our new toll-free number.

Sincerely,

Ann Collins Chadwick

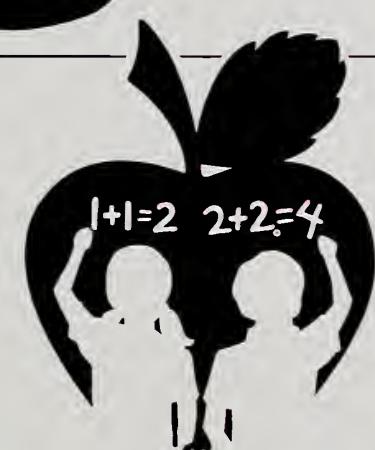
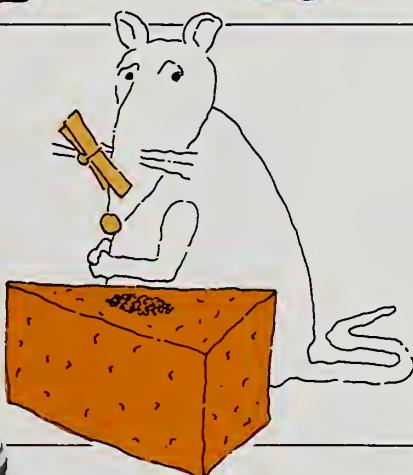
Ann Collins Chadwick, Director
Office of Consumer Advisor

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Consumer Education

Menu "Witchery" for Your Halloween Party — Nutritious, Delicious Treats

The "ghosts and goblins" will soon be gathering for Halloween parties. What kinds of party fare will you provide this year?

Why not make your party treats count nutritionally? Instead of candies, consider fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, milk, cheese, meats, peanut butter, nuts and seeds.

Not only will they be good for the young sters, they're fun too.

For younger children try:

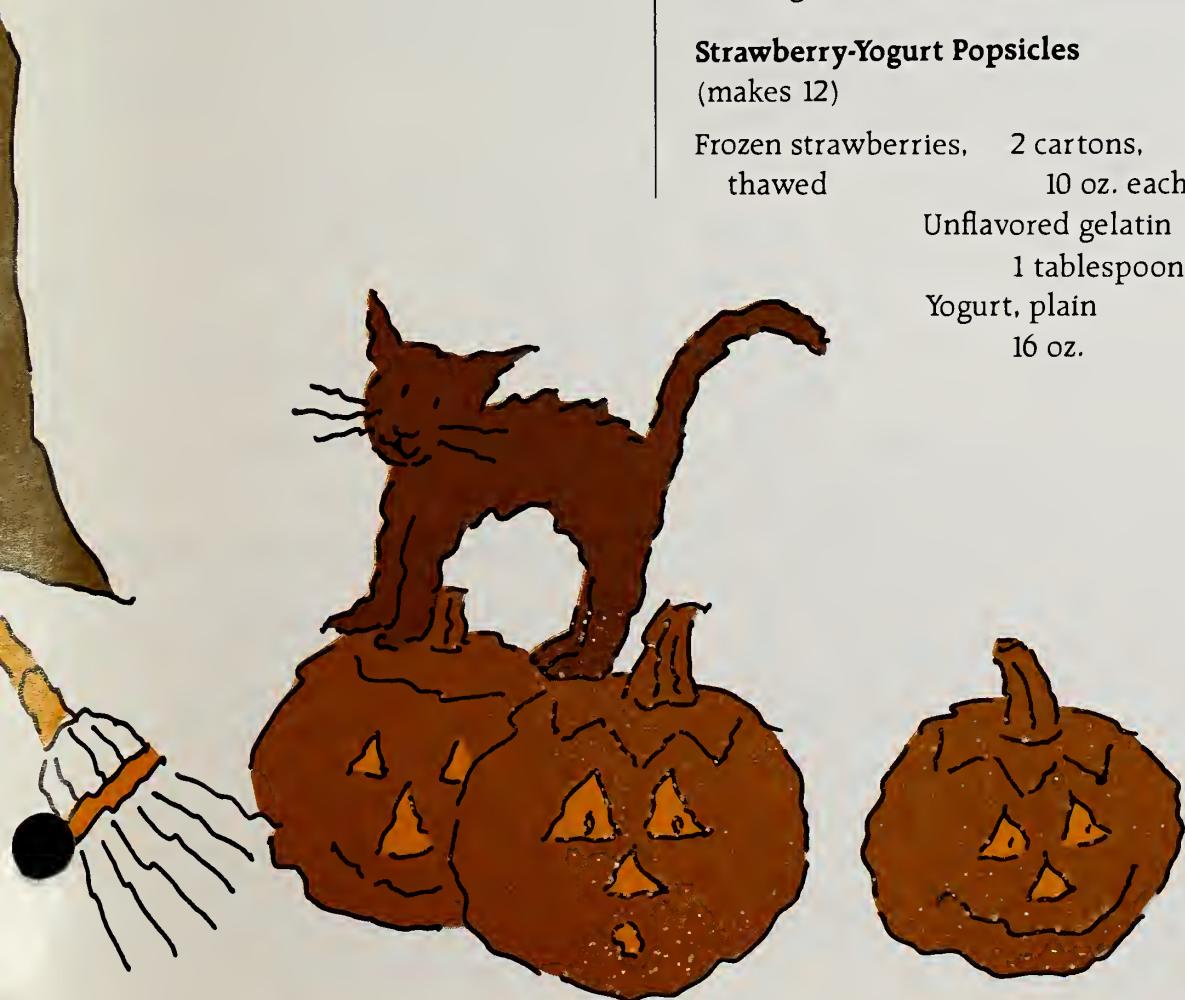
- A fruit milkshake — a banana blended with milk and seasoned with a dash of nutmeg or cinnamon.
- An orange smoothie (See "Pumpkin Patch Recipes").
- Strawberry yogurt popsicle (recipes).

- Apple slices peeled and spread with peanut butter or soft cheese.
- Cereal cookies baked on popsicle sticks.
- Carrot cake made into cupcakes.
- Breads made with fruits or vegetables, like banana, zucchini or pumpkin.



At a Halloween party for older children or teenagers, try these popular but still healthful snacks:

- Hot spicy fruit juices.
- Fruit punch made with a mixture of juices, like grape-orange or cranberry-apple, with club soda for "fizz."
- Celery stuffed with cottage cheese, bean dip, peanut butter, peanut butter with raisins, or pimiento cheese.
- Nachos—A new food fad of shredded cheese on corn chips broiled until the cheese melts.
- Snack pizza—Guests choose their own toppings from lean ground beef, lean ham bits, onion, mushrooms, and green pepper.
- Pita bread sandwiches—Each teen fills the pocket bread with "salad bar" items like shredded lettuce or cabbage; cheese; lean roast meat; refried beans; chopped egg, onions, cucumbers or tomatoes; sliced green peppers or zucchini; and several choices of salad dressing.



Pumpkin Patch Recipes

Snack Pizzas (makes about 10)

Refrigerator biscuits,	9½-oz. package flaky	(10 biscuits)
Tomato paste	¼ cup	
Oregano	1 teaspoon	
Onion, chopped	¼ cup	
Canned mushrooms,	½ cup chopped	
Natural sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded	½ cup	

1. Preheat oven to 400° F (hot).
2. Grease baking sheets.
3. Pat each biscuit into a 4-inch circle on baking sheets.
4. Mix tomato paste and oregano. Brush on each biscuit round.
5. Mix onion and mushrooms. Sprinkle over tomato paste mixture. Top with shredded cheese.
6. Bake until crust is lightly browned (about 8 minutes).

Note: Ingredients such as cooked lean ground beef, lean ham bits or chopped green pepper may be used in place of, or along with onions and mushrooms.

Strawberry-Yogurt Popsicles

(makes 12)

Frozen strawberries,	2 cartons, thawed	10 oz. each
		Unflavored gelatin 1 tablespoon
		Yogurt, plain 16 oz.

Paper cups, 3-oz.	12
Wooden sticks	12
1. Drain strawberries.	
2. Place drained liquid in a saucepan and sprinkle with gelatin. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until gelatin dissolves.	
3. Mix strawberries, yogurt, and gelatin mixture in a blender until smooth.	
4. Place cups on a tray or in a baking pan. Fill with blended mixture and cover cups with a sheet of aluminum foil.	
5. Insert a stick for each popsicle by making a slit in the foil over the center of each cup.	
6. Freeze popsicles until firm.	
7. To loosen, run warm water on outside of cup.	

Orange Smoothie (makes about 4½ cups)

Frozen orange juice concentrate	1 can
Milk	1 cup
Water	1 cup
Sugar	¼ cup
Vanilla	½ teaspoon
Ice cubes	10

1. Blend all ingredients in blender until smooth.
2. Serve immediately.

At Halloween and all year, snacks are an important part of a child's nutritional intake. They provide some of the nutrients missed at mealtime, since small children may not be able to eat enough at one time to adhere to an adult meal schedule. Fast-growing, active older children often need extra helpings of foods, too, for additional vitamins and minerals.

— Lois Fulton

For more information on nutritious Halloween snacks, contact Ms. Fulton at: the USDA Human Nutrition and Information Service, Agricultural Research Center-East, Bldg. 307, Rm. 330, Beltsville, Md. 20705. Phone: 202/344-2513.

A New Look in Hot Lunches From Home

As warm summer days fade into the brisk coolness of fall, hearty hot lunches take on a new appeal.

Too often, though, hot lunches brought from home lack pizzazz.

Why? Until recently, the only practical way to bring a hot lunch was to carry soup, chili or stew in your thermos. Not that a thermos lunch can't be appealing — see two great recipes in "Heavenly Hot Lunches."

But today's 9-to-5'ers have another option — the microwave oven! The microwave is perfect for fixing soups-in-a-cup, reheating sliced, smoked turkey for pumpernickel sandwiches, making your own baked potato extravaganzas with special toppings and reheating great vegetable entrees. The possibilities are limitless.

Still, advances in cooking technology don't change the basics of food safety. So, to keep your thermos or microwaved lunch *safe* and delicious, you'll want to follow these rules:

Thermos Tips

- Check to make sure your thermos cover fits securely enough to maintain a safe hot temperature (over 140° F). If your thermos is not keeping food hot until lunchtime, discard it.
- While your soup or stew is heating, preheat the thermos by filling it with boiling water and letting it stand for a few minutes.
- Also, heat your soup or stew to boiling before filling the thermos. This is your best insurance that the food will stay safely hot until lunchtime.
- Every evening, wash the thermos with hot, soapy water. Rinse well with hot water and allow it to dry — opened — overnight. If the cover comes apart, wash each piece and let them air-dry overnight too.

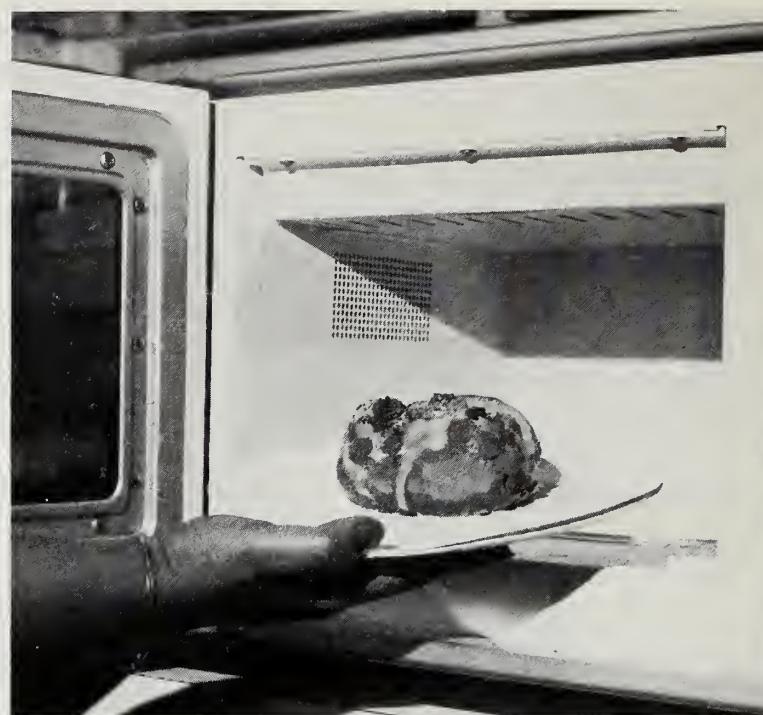
Microwave Musts

- To save time and fuss, pack your lunch in microwaveable dishes.
- Refrigerate any perishables until you're ready to pop them in the

office oven.

- Work-time lunches are often rushed, so choose foods that will heat quickly in the microwave.
- Make sure you use the right setting to thoroughly cook or re-heat food.

Remember, all it takes to produce a hot, safe (and exciting) office lunch is a bit of planning ahead.



"Hot Heavenly Lunches"

Chili Macaroni

This stick-to-your-ribs dish is perfect with microwaved French bread spread with unsalted butter.

4 servings, about 1½ cups each.
Calories per serving: About 390.

Regular ground beef	½ pound
Onion, chopped	¼ cup
Celery, chopped	¼ cup
Tomatoes	16-ounce can
Dry kidney beans, cooked, unsalted, drained	2 cups
Elbow macaroni, uncooked	1 cup
Water	1½ cups
Chili powder	2 to 3 teaspoons (as desired)
Garlic powder	¼ teaspoon
Salt (optional)	¼ teaspoon

1. Cook beef, onion and celery until beef is well-browned. Drain fat.
2. Break up large pieces of tomatoes. Add with remaining ingredients to meat mixture.
3. Bring to boiling; reduce heat and boil gently, uncovered, until mixture is thickened and macaroni is tender, about 20 minutes.

NOTE: 2 cups canned kidney beans, drained, may be used in place of cooked dry kidney beans; omit salt if canned beans are used. About 370 calories per serving.

Split Pea Soup

Cornbread sticks served with this savory soup make an authentic "Southern" meal.

6 servings, about 1 cup each.
Calories per serving: About 195.

Dry green split peas	1½ cups
Smoked ham hock	1 small
Onion, chopped	½ cup
Pepper	⅛ teaspoon
Water	6 cups

1. Add peas, ham hock, onion, and pepper to water. Simmer, covered, 1½ hours or until ham hock is tender.
2. Remove ham hock and cut meat from bone. Cut meat into small pieces.
3. Return meat to soup. Heat to serving temperature.

— Ann Collins Chadwick, Director, Office of Consumer Advisor-USDA, Rm. 230-W, Administration Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: 202/382-9681.

Recipes tested by USDA's Human Nutrition and Information Service, Agricultural Research Center-East, Bldg. 307, Rm. 330, Beltsville, Md. Phone: 202/344-2513.

Special Feature

Know Your Molds

The first thing you should know about molds is that they hold a world-class endurance record. Scientists think they're about 3 billion years old. Real late-comers by comparison, dinosaurs appeared a mere 220 million years ago.

This has something to tell us—we're not going to get rid of molds any time soon. Rather, we're going to have to learn how to live with them.

Why are they so hardy? Perhaps it's their simplicity. Requiring only minimal moisture and air, molds grow nearly everywhere.

Using airborne spores much like dandelion seed, they spread easily too. However, mold spores—microscopic in size—are invisible to the naked eye.

Warm-weather-loving types, molds are a greater problem in summer, but—as you know—they grow year-round in the refrigerator. That's what makes them a Number-1 consumer headache!



Good Molds and Bad

Many molds perform useful functions—they age and flavor cheeses, are used in breadmaking, ferment liquor, help prepare soy sauce, produce penicillin and streptomycin and manufacture citric acid used to flavor soft drinks. But they can also be destructive.

Molds hasten food spoilage and cause allergic and respiratory problems. And a few molds, under the right conditions, produce mycotoxins or poisons. Grain and nut crops, like peanuts, are at high risk for toxic

mold growth, so these crops are federally monitored. Both USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) play a part in assuring that foods made from them are safe when they arrive at your grocery. It's up to you, though, to handle any mold growth that occurs—usually in the refrigerator—after you get these and other foods home.

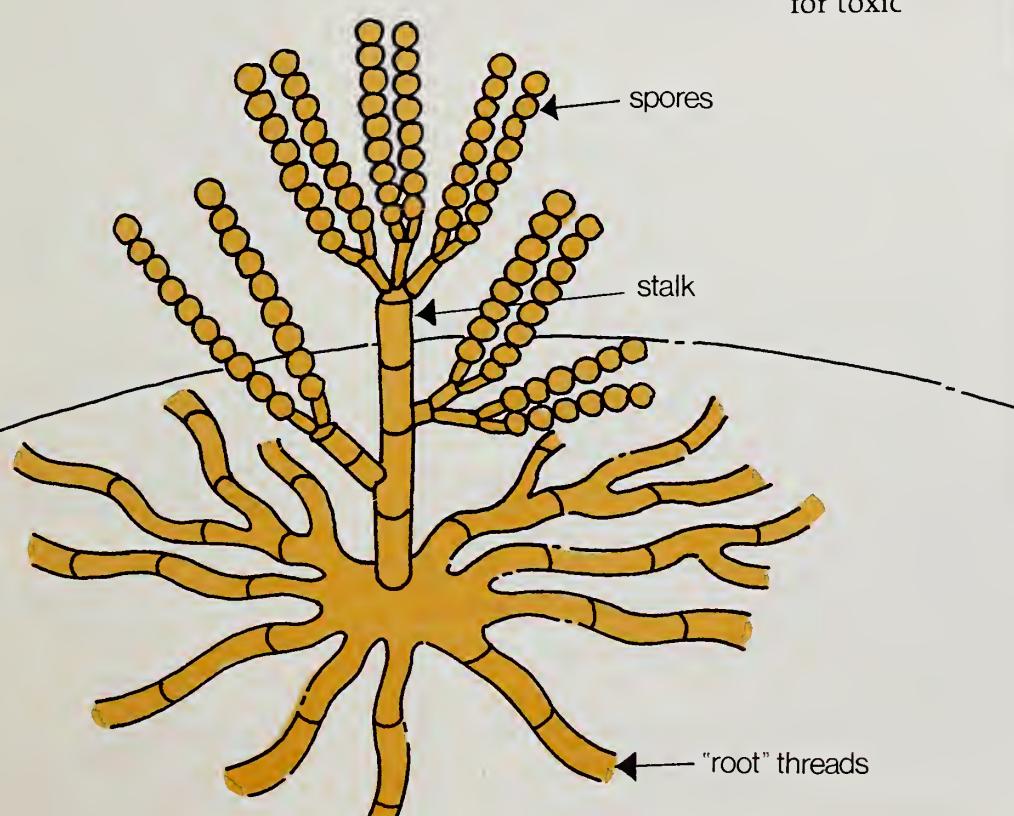
How Molds Grow

When you see a blue or whatever color spot on food, that's a clue the mold has been growing long enough to produce the spores (see drawing) that give it a characteristic color. For the first 2-3 days, most molds look white.

Further, the surface mold you see is just the tip of the iceberg. The larger part of the plant is made up of threads that invade the food below the surface. These "roots" nourish the mold plant.

In those few molds that produce poisons, the mycotoxins are contained in and around these threads.

Molds grow in the refrigerator because, while they prefer higher temperatures, they can tolerate the lower range. Molds also tolerate salt and sugar better than most other food invaders. So you find mold in refrigerated jams and jelly (high sugar) and in cured, salty meats—ham, bacon, salami.



The "Refrigerator" Molds

+Known mycotoxin producers

Alternaria — Black or grayish-black. Common on apples, cherries, tomatoes, and other fleshy fruits. Can cause serious allergy problems. Avoid inhaling.

Aspergillus (As-per-jillus) —
+flavus — Green. Grows on cereal grains, nuts, oilseeds. Can produce the dangerous aflatoxin, so these products are carefully monitored before sale.

glaucus — Green or gray. Seen on jelly, pastries, cured ham, salami.

niger — The black bread mold. Used commercially to produce citric acid.

Cladosporium — "Army fatigue" green or gray. Infests grain, dried beans and starchy foods — cooked macaroni casseroles, chicken and noodles. A blackish-green, allergy-producing species is found on shower curtains, bathroom caulking and in heating and refrigerating ducts.

Fusarium — Fuzzy, whitish-beige to red. Grows in grains. You could see it on corn-on-the-cob.

Coping with mold.

Here are some suggestions for holding the line against the mold crew.

Minimize mold growth in your refrigerator and home.

While it's hard to work serious housecleaning into a busy schedule, it's vital in controlling mold. Mold spores from infected food can build up in your refrigerator, shortening the life of other foods. Recommendation: Clean the inside of the refrigerator with 1 tbsp. of baking soda dissolved in a quart of water. Rinse with clear water and dry. Scrub visible (usually black) mold on rubber casings with 3 tbsp. of bleach in a quart of water.

Mucor (Mew-kor) — Fluffy, whitish-gray. This mold frequently joins another on fruits, tomatoes and peppers. It grows quickly, destroying the food.

Penicillium —

- +cyclopium — Slate blue/green. Grows on bread, cheese, smoked and cured meats.
- +expansum — Green, gray-green, brown. Affects apples, quinces, pears.
- +viridicatum — Bright green. Found on cheese, aged salami, sausage, cured ham.

*See note

Rhizopus (Rye-zo-pus) — Fluffy white with "black pepper" spores. Later growth looks smoky. A fast-growing species that often joins another mold, it favors bread, pastries and fruit.

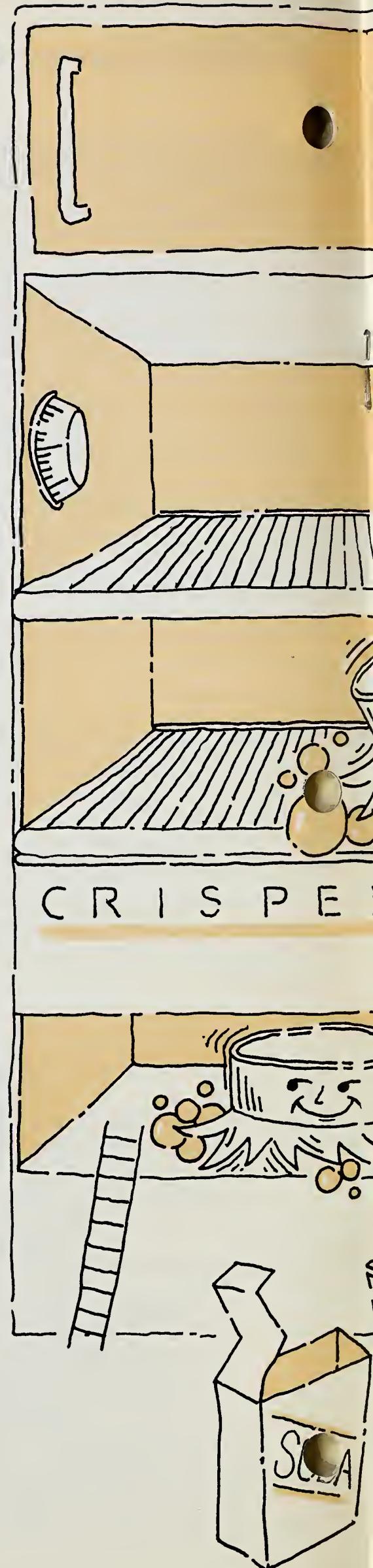
*No need for alarm: Mycotoxin-producing Penicillium molds are trouble-makers chiefly at warm, outside temperatures. They produce very little toxin at refrigerator temperatures — usually at levels too low to be harmful.

Be sure to keep those great mold spreaders — dishrags, dish cloths, sponges and mops — clean and fresh. A musty smell means they're moldy.

Don't unknowingly buy moldy food.

Fresh meat and poultry are usually mold-free, but cured meats and smoked turkey are mold targets. Generally, do not buy meat or poultry showing mold growth. Possible exceptions to this rule are "San Francisco" and some Italian-type dry salami, purposely coated in thin, white mold. But these salamis shouldn't show any other mold.

Carefully examine packaged foods, fresh fruits and vegetables. Spot-check the vulnerable stem areas of





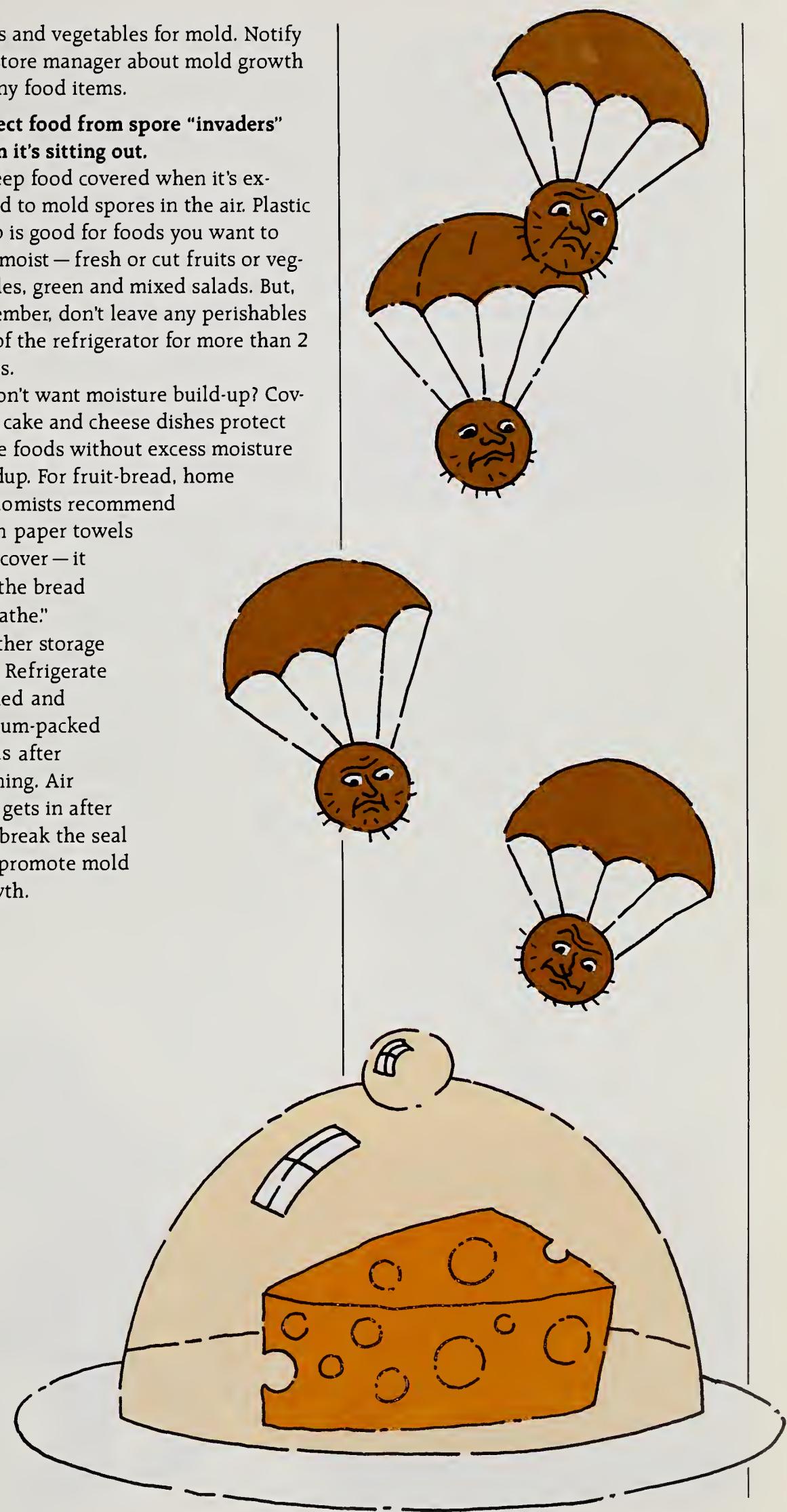
fruits and vegetables for mold. Notify the store manager about mold growth on any food items.

Protect food from spore "invaders" when it's sitting out.

Keep food covered when it's exposed to mold spores in the air. Plastic wrap is good for foods you want to stay moist — fresh or cut fruits or vegetables, green and mixed salads. But, remember, don't leave any perishables out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours.

Don't want moisture build-up? Covered cake and cheese dishes protect those foods without excess moisture buildup. For fruit-bread, home economists recommend clean paper towels as a cover — it lets the bread "breathe."

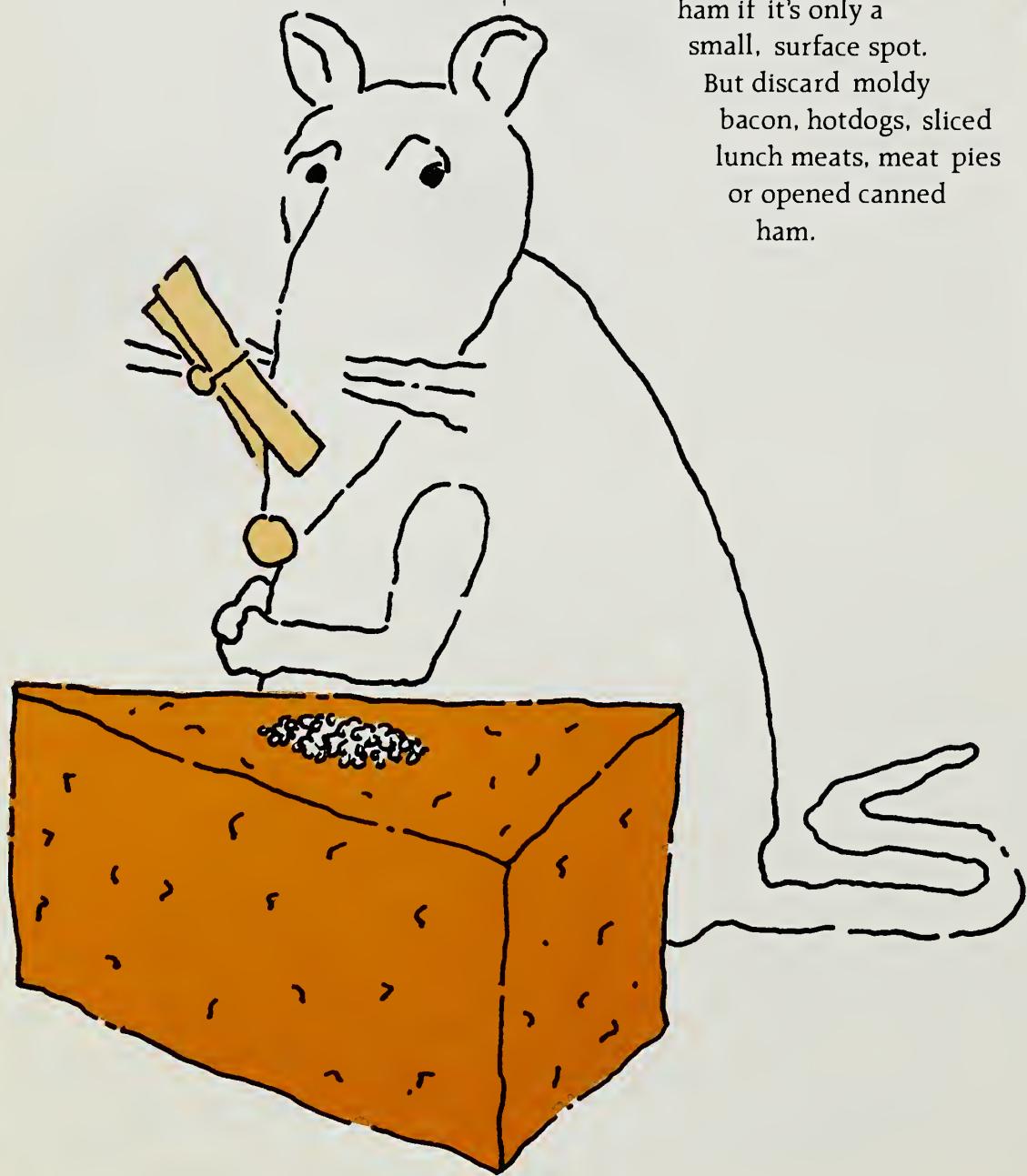
Other storage tips: Refrigerate canned and vacuum-packed items after opening. Air that gets in after you break the seal can promote mold growth.



Oops...there's mold on it.

The best way to keep food from going moldy in the refrigerator is to buy smaller amounts and use it quickly. But now and then something falls between the cracks. When that happens—

Don't *sniff* the moldy item — You don't want to buy any respiratory trouble. If a food is heavily covered with mold, throw it away immediately. Wrap it in plastic wrap or gently place it in a small paper bag to keep the spores from infecting the rest of the room. Clean the refrigerator, if necessary, where it was sitting, and examine other items it contacted. Mold spreads quickly in fruits and vegetables.



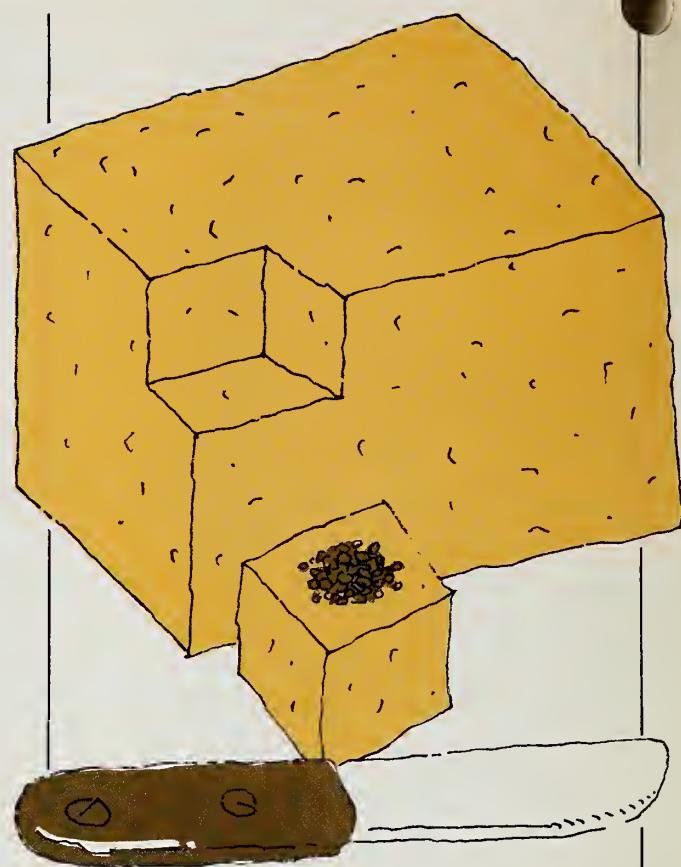
But, if the food shows only a tiny spot of mold, use these rules-of-thumb as a guide.

- **Cheese.** Some cheese, of course, is made with mold, but you spot mold that shouldn't be there. In hard block cheeses, cut off at least an inch around and below the mold spot. Keep your knife or cheese-wire out of the mold itself. After the surgery, recover the cheese in fresh wrap. Don't try to save individual cheese slices, soft cheese, cottage cheese, cream, sour cream or yogurt.

- **Hard salamis.** You can cut a small spot of mold off following the cheese rule. Again, keep the knife out of the mold.

You can also cut mold off dry-cured country ham if it's only a small, surface spot.

But discard moldy bacon, hotdogs, sliced lunch meats, meat pies or opened canned ham.



- **Smoked turkey.** Cut a small spot of mold off the surface using the cheese rule. Throw moldy baked chicken out.

- **Jams & Jellies.** A tiny spot of mold can probably be safely scooped out of jelly or jam. Then get a second clean spoon and scoop out considerably around the spot. If the remainder looks and smells normal, you can use it. But if it tastes fermented, throw it out.

- **Fruits and vegetables.** You can cut away small spots of mold from the surface of firm fruits and vegetables (cabbage, bell peppers, carrots), but you should discard soft vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce) showing mold growth.

- **Throw Away on Sight.** Visibly moldy bread, cake, buns, pastry, corn-on-the-cob, stored nuts, flour, whole grains, rice, dried peas and beans, and peanut butter. Pay special attention to health or "natural" foods. Processed without preservatives, they are at high risk for mold.

— Mary Ann Parmley

Food Safety

Hotline Calling — What Consumers Are Asking About Fall Food To Go

Cool autumn days are approaching, and soon the summer heat will be mere memory. Freedom from high summer temperatures, however, doesn't mean that food safety practices can be abandoned. When school, camping, football and other fall activities call for food-to-go, safe handling is still essential to prevent food poisoning.

These answers to questions consumers are asking USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline should help you enjoy a safe, carefree fall.

Q: My daughter prefers taking lunch from home. But since I pack her lunch so early in the morning — she has a long bus ride, I'm afraid it won't stay safe until lunch. What can I do?

A: A packed lunch can cause problems if it's not prepared or stored properly. These tips will help you keep your daughter's lunches safe:

- Keep everything clean. Wash your hands, cooking utensils, countertops, the lunchbox and thermos with soap and warm water before fixing her lunch. If she's a brown-bagger, use a clean bag every day.

- Refrigerate lunch fixed the night before. Pack her bag with perishables — meat or poultry sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs — and refrigerate it. Add chips and cookies — things that go limp in the refrigerator — the following morning.

- Put as many cold items as possible in the packed lunch. Try the new commercial freeze-paks. And you can try freezing some sandwiches. The sandwich thaws in time for lunch and keeps everything else cool in the meantime. Note: Coarse-textured

breads work best, and hold the lettuce and tomato. They don't freeze well, but can be packed in the morning and added to the sandwich at noon.

- Use a thermos to keep milk, juice or other drinks cold.

- Advise your daughter to put her lunch in a refrigerator if the school has one she can use. Failing that, have her put it in the coolest place possible — out of direct sun and away from warm radiators.

- Unless she can refrigerate her lunch again after eating, tell her to throw all perishable leftovers away. This does not apply to non-perishable items, of course, like chips, cookies or fresh fruit.

Q: I don't have a refrigerator where I work, and I'm getting nervous about trying to take perishables like meat and poultry for lunch. Still, I like a hearty lunch and want the protein. Any suggestions?

A: Have you considered canned meat, poultry and fish — the new low-cal tuna or boned chicken products packed in water? Look for these items in small individual-serving-sized jars. That way you open and eat at one sitting. Cheese (another good protein source) and crackers combine well with potted meats. Just add carrot or celery sticks and fresh fruit for a tasty, well-balanced lunch. Need a mid-

morning or afternoon snack? Dry meats, such as beef jerky sticks, are a good pick-me-up.



They need no refrigeration.

Q: Every autumn, my family travels to our cabin in the mountains to see the beautiful colored leaves. This year we found a can of beef stew that was probably left from last year. Is it safe to eat?

A: Your stew is probably fine. Just make sure the can is not bulging, leaking or badly dented. Most canned goods have a shelf-life of several years.

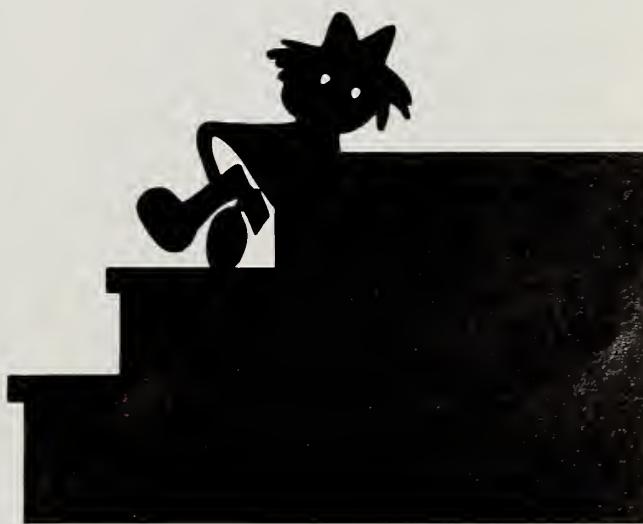
USDA's Meat & Poultry Hotline

800/535-4555

is open 10-4 weekdays EDT.

Your concern is wise, though, because if canned goods are left in an unheated cabin during the cold winter months, they could freeze and thaw several times. This can be a problem because when a canned item freezes, the food inside expands and the can may bulge or burst. Even if the can hasn't burst, the expansion due to freezing may cause microscopic openings in the seams. This could be dangerous. While the can's contents may not leak out, bacteria could enter through the openings and contaminate the food inside.

Q: My husband and I went camping over the weekend. He ate some meat loaf that was left in the cooler for a long time. The next day he felt nauseated and had a severe headache. Are these food poisoning symptoms?



A: Yes, nausea and headache are symptoms of food poisoning. Other symptoms are diarrhea, vomiting, cramps and fever. These flu-like problems often last only a few days and are seldom diagnosed as food poisoning. The most common food poisoners that affect food left out for long periods, like your meat loaf, are staph, salmonella and perfringens. The following food poisoning profiles may help you avoid trouble. The more you know, after all, the better you can protect yourself.

Staph, short for *Staphylococcus aureus*, can multiply in starchy foods, cooked and cured meat, and meat salads that have been sitting at warm temperatures too long. When staph food poisoning strikes, symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea usually appear 2 to 4 hours after eating, and last a day or two. Anyone with a staph infection — such as a sore throat or skin infection — can easily contaminate food. To avoid staph, wash your hands carefully before preparing food. Keep all food-contact surfaces and utensils clean, too. Never leave food out at room temperature over 2 hours.

Salmonella food poisoning can cause headache, diarrhea, and vomiting, and the illness may be more severe than that caused by staph. Salmonella strikes people from 12 to 36 hours after they've eaten. It may last 2 to 7 days. Salmonella may be found on meat and poultry, unpasteurized milk, eggs and fish. These bacteria grow quickly in raw, undercooked and improperly refrigerated foods. To prevent salmonella poisoning, thoroughly cook meat, poultry and fish. Keep everything that comes in contact with these foods clean, and store them at proper refrigerator temperatures (40° F. or lower). Low temperatures slow bacterial growth.

Perfringens, the "cafeteria" germ, may grow in foods served in quantity and left for long periods at room temperature, particularly hot food that is slowly cooling. It strikes large cuts of meat, and bulk servings of high-pro-

tein or starchy foods. Symptoms of perfringens food poisoning are diarrhea and/or gas pains that usually occur 8 to 24 hours after eating. Perfringens can be thwarted by dividing large servings into smaller portions for quick cooling. Keep hot food at 140° F. or above for serving. Be especially careful with perfringens-susceptible items such as cooked poultry, gravies and stews.

Q: I'm trying to save money, so I often take last night's roast beef or fried chicken for lunch. I usually reheat it in the microwave. Won't this kill bacteria that can cause food poisoning?

A: Normally, yes. But you don't want to count on reheating alone. The best approach is to refrigerate your lunch until you're ready to microwave it. Then make sure the oven is turned to the power setting designed to thoroughly reheat or cook the particular kind of food you've brought.

— Irene Goins

For more information on safe handling of foods, you can call the hotline. You can also request a free copy of "The Safe Food Book" from: FSIS Public Awareness, Room 1165-South, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: 202/447-9351.

Take a Piping Hot Supper to the Stadium

Once only an Ivy League custom, tailgating has caught on all over the country. At the stadium, stationwagon tailgates are used as tables and spread with delectable foods. Hence, the name.

"If you ask me the difference between a tailgate party and a picnic, I'd say the weather," said Stan Green, a senior microbiologist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Although tailgating is a cool weather activity," Green continued, "it still requires the same safe food-handling practices as summer picnicking. You must keep food poisoning ba-



ria from multiplying in meat, poultry and other perishable foods.

"You do this by keeping hot food hot, cold food cold and all food clean. With your hot thermos food — usually the centerpiece of a tailgate supper — you need to keep the soup, chili or stew hot until time to serve it. To prevent bacterial growth, thermos food should stay at or above 140° F," said Green.

A properly functioning thermos can keep food hot for several hours. Check the seal in your thermos top to make sure it's tight so that food stays safely hot.

Before use, wash the thermos with soapy water, and use very hot water to rinse it. Put your soup or stew (heated to boiling) in the container immediately. Starting with both hot food and a heated container will keep the food hot longer.

Try to prepare just the amount of thermos food you think your guests will eat. Discard any small leftover amount when you get home.

"And remember," Green said, "the home team can win against the food poisoners by practicing the simple rules of prevention."

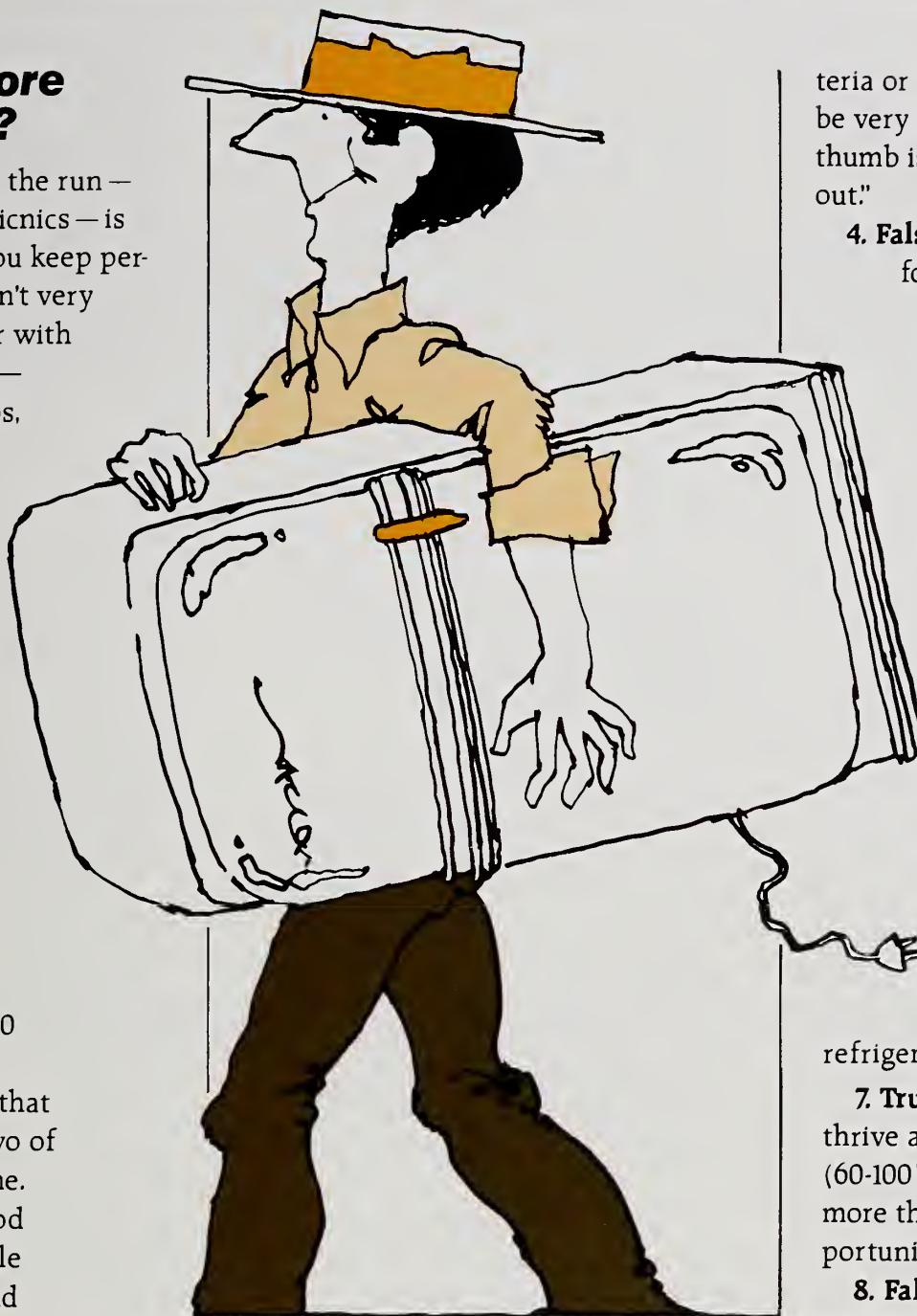
— Irene Goins

How Do You Score on Food Safety?

Packing food for life on the run — meetings, school, work, picnics — is pretty easy. But how do you keep perishable foods safe? You can't very well carry the refrigerator with you. Still, food poisoning — with the attendant cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and headaches — can result if you make a serious food handling mistake. Think you're informed enough to be safe? Try your hand at our quiz and see how you really score....

TRUE or FALSE

- 1. Food poisoning is a minor problem today. There are only about 5,000 cases each year.
- 2. Food poisoning isn't that serious. After a day or two of discomfort, you're just fine.
- 3. One way to avoid food poisoning is to taste a little bit of the suspect food and throw it out if it tastes strange.
- 4. You can tell when food poisoning bacteria are present, because the food smells different.
- 5. Freezing your child's school lunch sandwiches containing meat or poultry the night before can help keep them safe.
- 6. If you don't have a refrigerator at work, using a freeze-pak in the lunch bag can thwart the food poisoners.
- 7. You can avoid food poisoning by making sure that foods are not left at room temperature for over 2 hours.
- 8. It's a good idea to thaw foods at room temperature, because food poisoning bacteria can't live in that temperature range.
- 9. Food poisoning comes only from fresh milk, meat or poultry. Canned foods are always safe.



- 10. As long as food is in a cooler, you can leave it almost anywhere during your picnic.

Answers

1. **False.** Despite canning and a host of other technological advances, food poisoning is still a significant problem. An estimated two million cases occur each year.
2. **False.** Some kinds of food poisoning, like botulism, are very dangerous. And any poisoning can be serious in children, the elderly or people who are otherwise ill.
3. **False.** Never taste foods that you think might be unsafe. Even small amounts of some food poisoning bac-

teria or the poisons they produce can be very dangerous. A good rule of thumb is: "When in doubt, throw it out."

4. **False.** Generally speaking, most food poisoning bacteria are odorless, colorless, and tasteless.

5. **True.** Freezing sandwiches overnight is a good way to fight the food poisoners. But don't try to freeze mayonnaise, lettuce or tomato. They can be packed separately and added at lunchtime.

6. **True.** A commercial freeze-pak in the brown bag or lunch box keeps the rest of your lunch colder. A cold canned drink, frozen sandwich, or ice-filled plastic refrigerator dish can help, too.

7. **True.** Food poisoning bacteria thrive at room temperature (60-100° F.). Letting food sit out for more than 2 hours provides a fine opportunity for bacterial growth.

8. **False.** Thawing foods at room temperature provides a perfect breeding ground for many types of bacteria, because they multiply in the thawed outer areas of food before the interior is thawed. Try to plan far enough in advance to allow food to thaw in the refrigerator. Or, thaw in your microwave or in sealed packaging under cold water.

9. **False.** Food poisoning can come from a variety of sources, including canned goods. Leaking cans aren't the only villains. Dented, swollen, and rusted cans could lead to food poisoning too.

10. **False.** Keep coolers in the coolest, shadiest place possible while picnicking. Coolers are insulators, not refrigerators. Try transporting your cooler in the backseat — it's a lot cooler than the trunk.

— Richard Bryant

News Wire

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline Goes "800"

This past July 1, the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Meat and Poultry Hotline began toll-free service across the country. The hotline is staffed by USDA home economists, who answer calls weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (EDT).

Consumers calling **800-535-4555** can get information about the proper handling of meat and poultry products, or report problems with these foods. Callers in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area must call (202) 447-3333. Both numbers are accessible by Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs).

Commenting on the need for easier access to the hotline, Nancy Robinson, director of FSIS' Information and Legislative Affairs, said, "Converting to toll-free service will allow us to reach

**USDA's Meat & Poultry Hotline
800/535-4555
is open 10-4 weekdays EDT.**

a larger segment of those consumers who have food safety questions, such as the elderly and low-income. These people may not be aware of other information sources, and, for economic reasons, they are also the least likely to throw 'doubtful' food away."

A pilot program conducted in the fall of 1984 tested response to toll-free hotline service in three states. There was such positive consumer response that FSIS decided to expand toll-free access nationwide, Robinson said.

"Actually," Robinson continued, "the hotline activity is very much an informational two-way street. It provides consumers with vital information on the safe handling of meat and poultry, and our staff receive firsthand knowledge of consumers' interests and problems. It is consumer need, of course,

which influences our educational efforts."

Before going toll-free, the hotline had been in operation for three years, receiving about 2,000 calls a year. But with toll-free service, the volume is expected to jump to about 24,000 calls this year.

A factsheet on the Meat and Poultry Hotline is available from: FSIS, Public Awareness, Room 1165-South, Washington, D.C. 20250.

—Liz Lapping

"Numbers" Count in 1986 Children's Poster Contest

On September 17, a promotional mailing will alert every elementary school in the country to the beginning of USDA's 1986 children's food safety poster contest.

The 1986 theme? "We're trying something new this year — focusing on the arithmetic of food safety," said contest coordinator Judy Liggett. "The contest slogan is 'Food Safety Adds up to Good Health — You Can Count on It!'

"In planning this year's teaching material, we found some strong tie-ins between basic math and food safety," Liggett said. "For example, students in grades 1 and 2 will learn how to tell 'food safety time.' The study plan combines how to tell time with the rule that it's not wise to leave perishable food out of the refrigerator over 2 hours."

"Older students, grades 3 to 6, will learn *why* you shouldn't leave food unrefrigerated for over 2 hours. The answer is that many common food poisoning bacteria double in number

every 20 minutes or so. And at temperatures in the 85 to 100 degree range, some food poisoners multiply even faster," she said.

"We have a great new food poisoning villain this year too. Children like and remember our villains, so they're a good teaching aid. 'Count Bacula' will swoop through the pages of the teaching kits to show that you always have to be on your guard, food safety-wise. 'Bacula' . . . 'bacteria' got it?" she said.

"We spend a lot of time with educational specialists developing the contest teaching material, because the contest is, in essence, junior consumer education," Liggett continued. "The whole family benefits, too, because those messages do carry home from the classroom."

When students have covered the food safety basics in the teaching materials, they're ready for the fun part — drawing their posters. The 1986 deadline for receipt of posters is February 14.

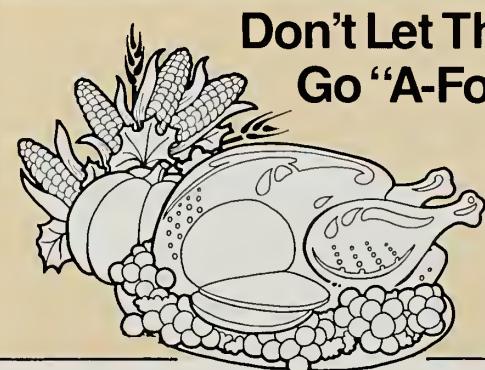
Children do not live by crayons alone, of course, so USDA offers some fine contest prizes. First-place winners and their teachers win \$200 U.S. Savings Bonds. Plus, the students, parents and teachers receive a trip to Washington, D.C. for a summer awards ceremony. The winners' schools receive \$400 for library and audiovisual purchases.

Teaching kits will be mailed out in early November and should be received by the end of the month.

Teachers or principals who have not received a kit by that time can request one from: Food Safety Poster Contest, P.O. Box 14313, Dayton, Ohio 45414.

— Mary Ann Parmley

Don't Let This Year's Holiday Meals Go "A-Fowl"



Write for *Talking About Turkey*, a free 20-page booklet explaining how to buy, store, thaw, stuff and prepare your holiday bird.

Write: Talking About Turkey 540 N. Consumer Information Center Pueblo, CO 81009



The Consumer's Almanac

Highlighting Food Events for the Fall Months

Event	Theme	Contact
National Beef Cook-off Wichita, Kansas September 24-26	Look for winning recipes in the Cook-off booklet. Focus: Using less expensive cuts.	Julia Larson National Livestock and Meat Board 444 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill. 60611 312/467-5520
Snack-A-Pickle Time September 22-October 5	Pickles as snack food.	W. R. Moore Pickle Packers International P.O. Box 606 St. Charles, Ill. 60174 312/584-8950
National Popcorn Month October 1-31	Celebrate October with a handful of America's can't-get-enough, high-fiber snack food.	Priscilla Abdreiev The Popcorn Institute 111 E. Wacker Drive Suite 600 Chicago, Ill. 60601 312/644-6610
National Apple Month October 1-31	"Pick Apples, America" — Apples are good tasting, good for you and a good snack.	Fred P. Corey, Marketing International Apple Institute P.O. Box 1137 McLean, Va. 22101 703/442-8850
National Pasta Week October 13-19	A Tribute to Pasta Lovers Everywhere. Enriched pasta contains riboflavin, thiamin, niacin, and iron.	Leanne Monroe National Pasta Association P.O. Box 25496 Washington, D.C. 20007 202/333-0700
National Wurstfest New Braunfels, Texas November 1-10	New Braunfels' 25th annual tribute to German sausage features every conceivable "wurst" or sausage. Hear the Bohemian "oompah" bands. Last year 160,000 visitors crowded this tiny Texas town — some from as far away as Germany!	Bill Jackson Wurstfest Association New Braunfels, Tex. 78130 512/625-2385

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